

July 2006

DRAFT: Bachelor of Science in Nursing – Olympic College

Introduction

Olympic College is seeking Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) approval to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). Olympic College was one of four colleges selected by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges through a competitive process to develop a baccalaureate level program for students with an associate degree in an applied field. Nurses who have achieved licensure at the associate level would have the opportunity to continue their studies and complete a bachelor's degree. The RN-BSN pathway proposed by Olympic College is similar to longstanding programs offered by the state's established baccalaureate institutions and would be phased in through a unique collaboration with the University of Washington Tacoma (UWT) nursing program.

The BSN program proposal responds to a need for nurses trained at advanced levels in the local health care industry and offers students an opportunity to improve their skills and advance in their careers. With the implementation of the BSN program, Olympic College would be the only public college or university offering the BSN on the Olympic Peninsula.

Relationship to Institutional Role and Mission and the Strategic Master Plan

The primary mission of Olympic College is to provide quality education and training for all who seek to improve their lives through learning. Strategic planning in support of this mission includes establishing Olympic College as a health care education center for the region and increasing opportunities for a diverse local population. The program responds to this mission by providing a degree pathway that would allow nurses trained at the associate level to move into positions with greater authority and flexibility. In addition, the program would contribute to the community by preparing well-qualified health care workers at multiple levels.

Many elements of this program align well with the mission of Olympic College. However, the college's new authority to grant bachelor's degrees, even when limited to a single program, represents a significant expansion of the institution's role and mission. Developing a degree program at a new level has implications for accreditation and potential impacts on students, faculty, and institutional resources. These implications and impacts are discussed later in this summary.

Consistent with the goals of the *2004 Statewide Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education*, the program provides opportunities for students to earn degrees and responds to the state's economic needs. The proposed degree program also would respond to changing demand within the health care industry. Specifically, the program would meet the needs of students by providing access to a degree program that would enhance their skills and provide for career advancement. More broadly, the program responds to the economic needs of the state by providing a better trained workforce for a key economic sector. The job market for nurses is complicated by the fact that there are multiple levels at which a nurse might be training, so in addition to a general shortage of registered nurses there is also a shortage of nurses who possess higher levels of education required for certain jobs within the industry.

Program Need

The proposal responds to needs expressed by students, employers, and community stakeholders. The board's *State and Regional Needs Assessment* identified a substantial gap between the supply of prepared graduates in health care programs and projected employer demand for qualified workers. Roughly half of the demand for additional training at the baccalaureate and graduate level is in nursing. The HECB analysis estimates that 55 percent of nurses would be expected to have preparation at the baccalaureate level or higher. The National Advisory Council on Nurse Education indicates that as many as 66 percent of nurses ought to be trained at the baccalaureate level or higher.

The proposal cites multiple sources, including the *State and Regional Needs Assessment*, to demonstrate the need for additional trained nurses in the region and for more baccalaureate level nurses to meet employer demand. Annually, more openings are expected for registered nurses than any other occupational group requiring mid-level training in the Olympic and Pacific Mountain workforce development areas, the areas that comprise the Olympic Peninsula.

The gap is not limited to this region; the needs in nursing are a statewide problem. The Washington State Job vacancy survey finds that nursing accounts for the largest number of unfilled openings, with an estimated 4,473 vacancies statewide and more than 800 vacancies on the Olympic Peninsula. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation indicates this is a national problem that will continue to accelerate through the year 2020. Adding to these pressures, a growing population will increase the demands on the community's health care industry.

A key problem in meeting employers' needs for trained nurses is the many different sub-disciplines that require training at a specific level and/or in a specific area. Access to baccalaureate level education is a key element in that puzzle. Many positions and/or employers, such as local public health agencies and the naval hospital in Bremerton, require a bachelor's degree as the minimum qualification. In other cases, such as Harrison Medical Center in Bremerton, the bachelor's degree may not be required, but is strongly preferred. The bachelor's degree is also a requirement for further education, including advance practice occupations at the master's and doctorate levels – like nurse practitioners.

In a January 2006 survey of students, Olympic College found that 91 percent of respondents expressed an interest in the RN to BSN program. In a November 2005 survey of current practicing nurses by the Olympic Healthcare Alliance, 90 percent of respondents expressed an interest in the RN to BSN program. Olympic College currently graduates 50 qualified nurses with associate degrees annually. With recent increases in the size of the nursing cohort, this number should increase. In addition, Olympic College is reaching out to other local associate degree nursing programs to ensure the proposed program would articulate with their programs.

Currently, Old Dominion University offers the only baccalaureate level nursing program on the Olympic Peninsula. Offered primarily via videotaped lecture and online, the program has graduated 10 students with a BSN since 1998. The next closest option is University of Washington Tacoma, a 96-mile round trip from the Poulsbo campus.

Program Description

The proposed program would provide a local opportunity for registered nurses who have completed training at the associate level to continue their education and complete a bachelor's degree in nursing. RN to BSN completion programs are well-established in Washington and are offered by a number of colleges and universities; however, commute time and distance to existing programs are significant factors for students on the Olympic Peninsula who wish to complete the BSN.

The program would be developed through a unique collaborative arrangement with the University of Washington Tacoma. Under the agreement, UWT would contract with Olympic College to offer the first year of the program. Students then would be offered the opportunity to continue their study at UWT in the second year of the program or continue at Olympic College to complete the degree requirements. During the contract period, UWT would provide technical support and training to Olympic College faculty to support the development of the program. The agreement does not imply that the Olympic program would be a duplicate of the UWT program. Instead, Olympic would draw on the strength and expertise of the UWT faculty to design a program that would meet the unique needs of the region and prepare the faculty to deliver a high quality program.

Licensed nurses with an associate degree in nursing would be eligible to enroll in the RN to BSN program if they had a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 overall and a minimum 2.0 GPA in all required prerequisite courses. If more students meet the minimum requirement than space allows, admissions decisions would be based on GPA ranking.

Students would complete 40 credits of upper-division nursing credits in the program. In addition, they would be awarded 35 credits for completion of the NCLEX exam required for nursing licensure. The student also would transfer 40 nursing credits from their associate degree program and complete a total of 65 credits in general education. Specific course requirements would include: foreign language (two years in high school or two quarters in college), English

composition, college level math, statistics, chemistry, anatomy and physiology, and microbiology. The courses listed above would count within the broader distribution requirements including: 5 credits of quantitative reasoning, 15 credits of writing coursework, 15 credits of humanities coursework, 15 credits of social science coursework, and 18 credits of natural science coursework.

Program graduates would have enhanced career opportunities through greater promotional opportunities and greater flexibility in work assignments. A BSN or higher is required for nurses to work in some specialties. In addition, a number of employers prefer to hire at the baccalaureate level or above and/or provide opportunities for current nursing staff to continue their education. The program would be designed to ensure that graduates have the skills and knowledge required to take on greater levels of responsibility and to successfully enter and complete graduate education programs.

In the first year, the program would accommodate 20 FTE (40 headcount) students. The program would grow to approximately 50 FTE (95 headcount) students by the fourth year. The department estimates the program could be as large as 34 FTE students in the first year and 62 FTE students by the fourth year.

Individual students and the program would be assessed based upon clearly defined outcomes. Students would be assessed throughout the program on their individual coursework and portfolio of work. The program would be assessed on the success of students in the program, graduate surveys, and employer surveys. In addition, the institution will seek specialized accreditation through either the National League of Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC) or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).

In addition to the institutional student and program assessment, the program would undergo review due to the pilot status of the BAS degree programs. The SBCTC and the HECB will conduct evaluations of the programs following initial implementation. Finally, as the first degree at a new level, the proposed degree program would represent a substantive change that requires review by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), the regional accrediting body.

Diversity

The institution has received grant funding to support efforts to recruit a diverse student body. The nursing program would focus on developing the pipeline through recruitment of diverse students into the associate degree program and supporting students' continued study toward the bachelor's degree.

External Review

The program was reviewed by three external experts:

- Dr. Carl Christiansen, Dean of the Buntain School of Nursing, Northwest University
- Dr. Mary K. Salazar, Professor, School of Nursing, University of Washington
- Dr. Elizabeth Towner, Professor (retired), Western University of Health Science, College of Graduate Nursing and former dean, School of Nursing, Southern Oregon University

All three reviewers expressed support for the program and applauded the collaboration with University of Washington Tacoma. In addition, all of the reviewers indicated a critical need for expanded access to baccalaureate nursing degree programs.

Dr. Christiansen's Evaluation

Dr. Christiansen cited a number of strengths of the proposal, including the fit with the mission of Olympic College and a program evaluation plan that would lead to specialized accreditation. Dr. Christianson also made a number of suggestions to improve the program, including the use of off-site locations to attract diverse students and additional outcome measures. He recommended a careful review of the admission criteria, indicating that the 2.0 minimum GPA in prerequisite courses may be too low to predict success in upper-division coursework. Finally, Dr. Christiansen indicated the critical importance of attracting doctorate prepared faculty for the open positions. Program staff said they would incorporate his suggestions related to the development of the curriculum and off-campus coursework as they more fully develop the program. The minimum requirement of a 2.0 for statistics also would be reviewed as the program was developed. Finally, staff said the college is committed to hiring a director with an earned doctorate.

Dr. Salazar's Evaluation

Dr. Salazar also expressed support for the program and noted a number of strengths of the proposal, including the articulation of the learning outcomes and program evaluation plans, the potential to attract diverse students, and improvements in the library. Her concerns about the program centered on faculty load; she applauded the agreement with UWT, which would provide training for faculty, but pointed out that the skills required of faculty at the baccalaureate level were quite different than those at the associate level in nursing programs. These differences are apparent in the course content as well as the mentoring relationship and the added emphasis on research and writing at the baccalaureate level. On a related note, Dr. Salazar questioned whether the number of new faculty would be sufficient to support the program. Finally, Dr. Salazar raised some more specific questions about scheduling and distance learning options and suggested greater collaboration with nursing and other health professionals in the community.

The program developers shared Dr. Salazar's concern about faculty load and said they would work with faculty to proactively address any problems. The program developers also said they were fortunate to be able to attract highly-qualified instructors from a pool of retired military nurses residing in the area. The program is also seeking funding to provide opportunities for

existing faculty to continue their studies toward a doctorate. Approaches to deliver the curriculum via distance learning would be addressed as the program matures. Finally, the outreach to community health professionals has already begun and has been met with enthusiasm; the health community is very supportive of the development of the RN to BSN program.

Dr. Towner's Evaluation

Dr. Towner listed a number of strengths of the proposal, including the recruitment strategy, the link to the needs in the local community, and the provision for faculty and staff development. Her suggestions included the implementation of selection criteria for the admission process and a comparison of prerequisites at UWT and the proposed Olympic College program. The program developers responded to this concern about admission criteria by establishing a system where students would be admitted on the basis of GPA. The course prerequisites would be consistent with those at UWT.

Program Costs

Prior to the first year of the program, the institution would receive planning funds; no students would be enrolled in the program during the planning year. In the first implementation year of the program, with an entering class of 15 FTE students, costs are estimated to be \$10,467 per FTE. At full enrollment in the second year (30 FTE students), the cost would be \$10,433 per FTE. The average direct cost of instruction for baccalaureate programs in health sciences at the University of Washington Tacoma is \$15,131.

During the first year of implementation, the program would contract with the University of Washington Tacoma to provide nursing courses to 15 FTE students. The terms of the contract include a \$51,000 payment to the university. In addition, the college would provide appropriate facilities, including classroom space, office space, and computers. The university also would provide graduate level instruction for the existing Olympic College nursing faculty, with a focus on curriculum development. In the second year of the program, Olympic College would provide all instruction. At that point, the program would draw on current and newly-hired faculty. The program estimates a contribution of faculty time equivalent to 3.8 FTE in the nursing program and .66 FTE in the general education curriculum. Administrative and clerical costs are based on 2.5 FTE.

The program funds library improvements, including a .5 FTE librarian who would be responsible for developing the collection for the BAS program. Funding of \$10,000 is provided for purchase of books and materials in years one and two; in years three and four, the amount is reduced to \$5,000 per year. No program-specific library funding beyond the staff position is projected in year five.

The proposal also includes \$6,200 for faculty professional development in the first year and \$5,000 per year thereafter. Beginning in year two, \$30,000 per year is provided to support summer stipends for faculty.

Staff Analysis

The proposed program would support the unique role and mission of the institution. The program builds upon an associate degree program and would be developed through a collaboration with the University of Washington Tacoma School of Nursing. The program responds to the needs and aspirations of students and local employers and would serve the community by providing improved health care service through a better trained workforce.

The program also addresses the goals of the *2004 Statewide Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* of providing opportunities for students to earn degrees and responding to the economic needs of the state by providing trained workers in a critical industry to our economy and our communities. In addition, the program would provide access to baccalaureate level education and open the door to graduate level education for students who otherwise would not have the opportunity to continue their studies.

The program is consistent with the purpose of House Bill 1794, providing a bachelor's degree pathway to students who have completed an applied associate degree program and do not have ready access to other bachelor's degree programs.

The proposed degree program includes an assessment approach with well-defined student learning outcomes and multiple measures of student achievement. The program would be subject to a well-defined review process with feedback from various constituents. The proposed assessment plan is supported by external reviews. In addition, due to the pilot status of the degree program, the program would be subject to future review by the HECB, the SBCTC, and the NWCCU.

Finally, the program responds to demonstrated student, employer, and community needs and is consistent with the *State and Regional Needs Assessment* and the institution's own assessment of need. The institution consulted a variety of sources and has built community support for the program, which should prove useful in implementation and recruitment.

There are a number of suggestions for continued improvements raised by the external review that may warrant additional attention. Especially important is the need to attract nursing faculty at the doctorate level. In its ongoing work with UWT to develop the program, staff recommend that the department take a closer look at the proposed admission policy and consider a more holistic review that would include letters of reference, work experience, and students' writing and analytical abilities, rather than basing decisions solely on the GPA.

Adding bachelor's degree granting authority to Olympic College's mission has implications for accreditation and potential impacts on students, faculty, and institutional resources. Using planning money during the first year of the pilot to expand library resources and student support services would help position the college to best support students, faculty, and staff in the upper-division and successfully fulfill their stated mission of providing quality education and training to all who seek to improve their lives through learning.

The program would not duplicate existing programs and would be offered at a reasonable cost.

Recommendation

Based on careful review of the program proposal and supplemental sources, HECB board staff and the board's education committee recommend full board approval of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree program at Olympic College.

RESOLUTION NO. 06-17

WHEREAS, Olympic College proposes to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing primarily at its main campus in Poulsbo and at its Bremerton and Shelton campuses as required; and

WHEREAS, The program is consistent with the purpose of House Bill 1794, providing an applied bachelor's degree pathway to students who have completed a technical associate degree program and do not have ready access to other bachelor's degree programs; and

WHEREAS, The program would be developed through a collaboration with the University of Washington, Tacoma Nursing Program; and

WHEREAS, The program responds to the goals of the *2004 Statewide Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* of providing opportunities for students to earn degrees and responding to the economic needs of the state by providing trained workers in a critical industry; and

WHEREAS, The program responds to demonstrated student, employer, and community needs and is consistent with the *State and Regional Needs Assessment* and the institutions' own assessment of need; and

WHEREAS, The recruitment and diversity plans are appropriate for the program; and

WHEREAS, The college is committed to providing the services and support necessary to expand its institutional role and mission by offering a baccalaureate program; and

WHEREAS, The program is supported by external reviews and, due to its pilot status, would be subject to future review by the Higher Education Coordinating Board, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Higher Education Coordinating Board approves the Bachelor of Science (BS) in Nursing.

Adopted:

July 27, 2006

Attest:

Gene Colin, Chair

Bill Grinstein, Vice Chair